

A Portrait of Pre-kindergarten

In 2001, 43 states were offering some form of prekindergarten (pre-K). They invested over \$2 billion in education-related pre-K programs and served over 740,000 children. But little documentation of pre-K quality existed until the 2001 initiation of the Multi-State Study of Pre-kindergarten by the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCELD). Although several surveys of state pre-K programs have been conducted, this effort represents the first multi-state study to include extensive classroom observations, child assessments, and kindergarten follow-up. The findings fill an information gap about pre-K and serve as an information base for states and education agencies starting or expanding services for young children and their families. Articles co-authored by scientists from FPG, the University of Virginia, and the University of California at Los Angeles summarize the study and appear in recent issues of *Applied Developmental Science* and *Principal*.



Background of Study

The study is based on data collected from 240 state-funded pre-K programs in Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, and regions of California (Los Angeles and Central Valley) and New York (New York City and Albany). Of all 4-year-olds attending state pre-K programs in the U.S., about half are in these six states. For this study, “pre-K” applies to center-based programs for 4-year-olds that are fully or partially funded by state education agencies and that are operated in schools or under the direction of state and local education agencies.

Within each state, a sample of 40 centers/schools was selected at random. One classroom in each center/school was selected at random for observation, and four children in each classroom were selected for individual assessment (language, literacy, and number skills). Data collection tracked children from the beginning of pre-K through first grade.

Pre-K Children and Teachers

Major findings about **children** in this study:

- More than half of the children enrolled were from low-income families.
- African American, Latino, and Asian children were more likely than White children to be in a pre-K class with a high concentration of poor children.
- A large percentage of the mothers had only a high school education or less.
- Almost one-quarter of the children spoke a language other than English at home.
- With their entry into pre-K, the language ability of most children from low-income families was below the national average, as was their math ability. On standard measures of language and math, these children made small but meaningful gains from fall to spring of their pre-K year.

Major findings about **pre-K teachers** in this study:

- They averaged 42 years of age; most were female and White.
- Overall, about 70% of teachers had at least a bachelor’s degree.
- About half had at least a bachelor’s degree and state certification to teach 4-year-olds.
- About 30% had a two-year degree or no formal degree past high school.
- Pre-k teachers’ salaries were higher than those of child care teachers and approached the salaries of public school teachers.
- Teachers with lower qualifications (less than a bachelor’s degree) were more likely to teach poor children and children who were African American or Latino.

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